

The York County SPCA (YCSPCA) appreciates the vital role that Mason Dixon Animal Emergency Hospital (MDAEH) plays in supporting animal welfare in our community. In recent cases, we've noticed a growing expectation that the YCSPCA should cover the cost of emergency medical care for outdoor cats—regardless of their ownership or caretaker status. This document is intended to clarify our position and guide decision-making when these cases arise.

The YCSPCA will only cover the cost of emergency medical care for true stray cats brought in by Good Samaritans, as these cats have no known caretaker or owner. Outdoor cats with dedicated caretakers or those considered owned pets are not the financial responsibility of the YCSPCA in after-hours emergencies.

While the YCSPCA offers strong support systems for community cats—including spay/neuter, food assistance, and low-cost medical care through our CARMA program—financial responsibility for emergency care must remain with the caretaker or owner. This policy ensures that our limited funding is directed to the animals most in need and preserves the long-term sustainability of our programs.

We are happy to help these animals during our open hours and to work with caretakers to find affordable care options when needed.

Below you will find definitions for each category of cat, some important points to note, helpful visual aids, as well as talking points.

Important Definitions:

1. **Pennsylvania Statute Title 18, Subchapter Cruelty to Animals, #5535 Neglect of Care:**

- a. Offense defined: A person commits an offense if the person fails to provide for the basic needs of each animal to which the person has a *duty of care*, whether belonging to himself or otherwise, including any of the following:
 - i. Necessary sustenance and potable water.
 - ii. Access to clean and sanitary shelter and protection from the weather. The shelter must be sufficient to permit the animal to retain body heat and keep the animal dry.
 - iii. Necessary veterinary care.

2. **Duty of Care:** The law establishes a duty of care for individuals who own or possess animals, or who have control or responsibility for them.

3. Good Samaritan Stray Cat

- **Definition:** A stray cat that someone has found and sought help for out of kindness. They had not seen or interacted with the cat prior to finding it. They also have no intent to start feeding or managing.
- **Good Samaritan Role and Responsibility:** A Good Samaritan may voluntarily offer food and water when first finding the cat; however, they take quick action to bring the animal to a local animal shelter, veterinary clinic, or emergency facility in hopes of finding its owner or getting it the help it needs.
- **Ownership:** These cats have no caretaker or known owner at the time of finding.

4. Community Cat with a Caretaker

- **Definition:** A cat that lives outdoors and is part of a known group or colony, often semi-feral or feral. The caretaker oversees the colony, provides food, water, shelter (if applicable), often TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return) services, and monitors for any concerning medical issues. This cat becomes dependent upon the caretaker's food supply and if abandoned its health would decline if unable to find another local food source.
- **Caretaker Role and Responsibility:** Their role is to regularly provide food and water, provide shelter if applicable, monitor the size and health of the colony, as well as provide necessary medical care.
- **Ownership:** When a caretaker begins feeding a colony of cats and monitoring their health and status, that person assumes duty of care and a de facto ownership role. Just like indoor pet owners, caretakers are expected to take financial responsibility for food, shelter, and medical care. The YCSPCA does provide resources to the caretakers if they need help.

5. Owned Pet Cat

- **Definition:** A domesticated cat that is considered a pet. They are usually socialized with people and completely reliant on their owner's food, shelter, love and care. They may live primarily indoors, be indoor/outdoor, or be a fully outdoor cat.
- **Owner Role and Responsibility:** The owner is fully responsible for the cat's well-being, safety, medical needs, and behavior.

We understand that the difference between a stray cat found by a good samaritan and a community cat with a caretaker can be somewhat nuanced. Here are some important points to note:

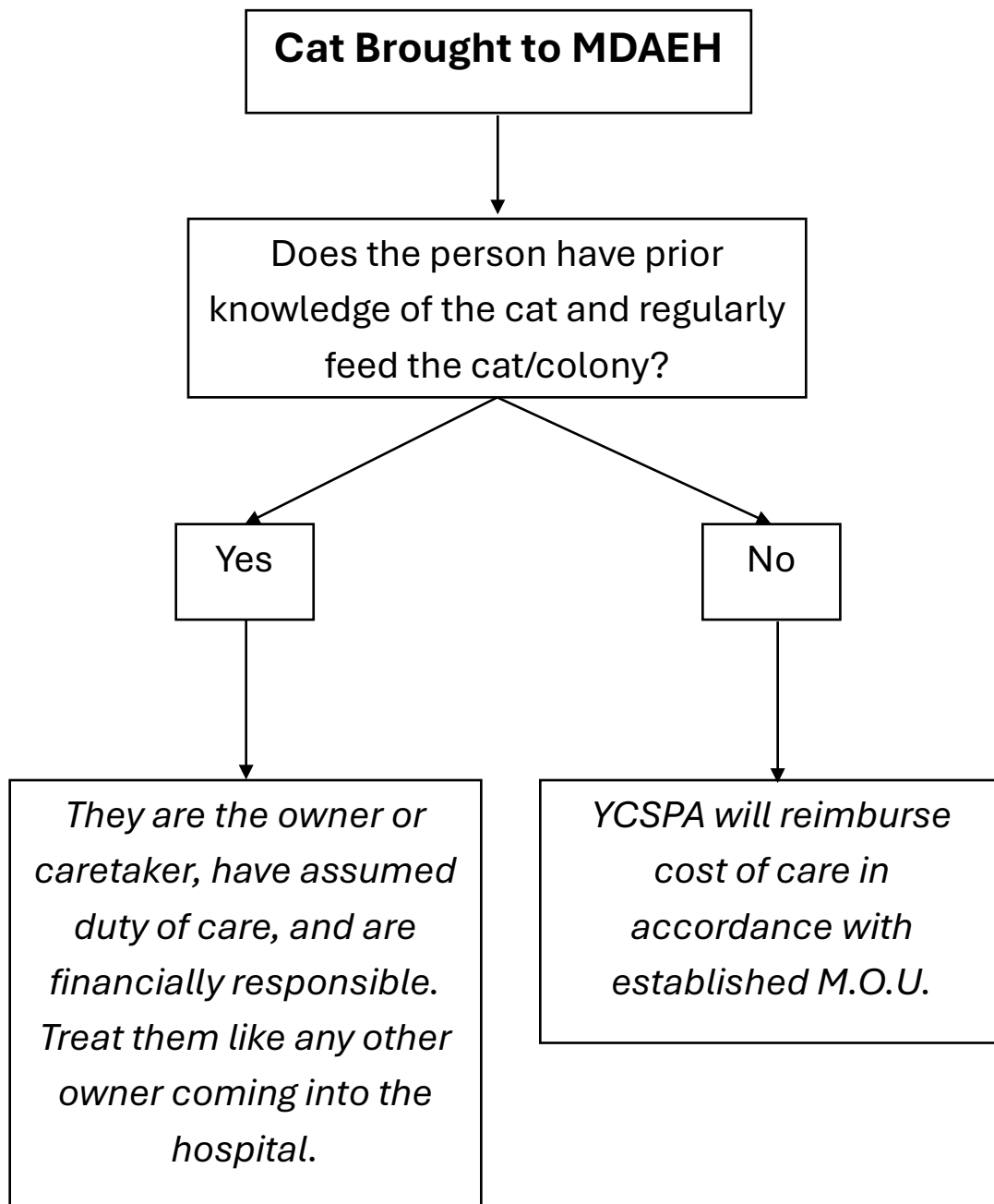
1. A good samaritan will have no prior knowledge of the found cat. They likely stumbled upon them in their normal day-to-day routine but are unsure if they are a feral cat, owned cat who is lost, etc. A caretaker to a community cat will have prior knowledge of the cat which may include their eating habits, any progression of medical signs, and when or if they were TNR'd.
2. All three of the above categories will utilize the YCSPCA TNR program (including owned pet cats disguised as feral cats – which is a serious misuse of TNR). Therefore, a cat brought into the YCSPCA TNR clinic does not distinguish which category they are. One main difference is that a good samaritan would have no follow-up with the cat after their release following surgery. If someone is aware of how the cat has been recovering post-op they are either the owner of a pet cat or have assumed duty of care as the caretaker of a community cat. In either case, they have the financial responsibility to seek care for the cat.
3. In a clinical veterinary setting, ongoing familiarity with a cat (such as monitoring post-op recovery or presenting detailed medical history) is often used to determine ownership or custodial responsibility. If someone is bringing in a cat and can report symptoms, appetite, or behavior over time, that indicates an established relationship – akin to ownership.
4. Although the YCSPCA views a caretaker as responsible for their outdoor colony of community cats, we do have support available if needed. This includes providing food assistance or coupons to purchase food as well as assistance with low-cost medical care through our CARMA program.
5. The YCSPCA would not cover the cost of emergency medical care after hours for cats with dedicated caretakers; however, they can be directed to our facility the following morning for help. The YCSPCA is limited in funding and for overnight care it must be prioritized to medical emergencies for true strays with no known caretakers. Expecting the YCSPCA to absorb costs for community cats with known caretakers strains resources and diverts aid from animals who truly have no one. Under the current memorandum of understanding these cats would fall under owned animals.
6. Covering the cost of community cats with known caretakers would set the precedent that the YCSPCA will provide free 24/7 medical care to all outdoor cats in York County regardless of their owner status. The YCSPCA supports community cats through programs such as TNR, SNR, pet pantry, and the CARMA program. These programs demonstrate YCSPCA's commitment, but we rely on shared responsibility between shelter, caretaker, and the community – not a one-sided burden.

Table 1: How to determine if YCSPCA will reimburse emergency medical care

Category	Prior Relationship with cat?	Ongoing Feeding?	Monitoring Health?	YCSPCA Emergency Coverage?	Notes
Good Samaritan Stray	No	No	No	✓ Yes	Unknown origin, no known support system
Community Cat with Caretaker	Yes	Yes	Yes	✗ No	Caretaker assumes responsibility, can direct to YCSPCA in morning if they have financial constraints
Owned Pet Cat	Yes	Yes	Yes	✗ No	Belongs to an individual/family

Table 2: What services are each category eligible for at the YCSPCA

Category	SNR	CARMA	Surrender to shelter for adoption?	Pet Pantry	Service through spay/neuter clinic
Good Samaritan Stray	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✗ No, unless signs of abandonment or came from a dangerous environment and has a friendly demeanor to adopt	✓ Yes	🐾 TNR
Community Cat with Caretaker	◆ Case by case basis	✓ Yes	✗ No	✓ Yes	🐾 TNR
Owned Pet Cat	✗ No	✓ Yes	✓ Yes, with approved surrender application	✓ Yes	🏠 Low-cost spay/neuter



Talking Points for MDAEH Staff:

1. Determine the Relationship

- Ask if the individual bringing in the cat has fed or monitored the cat before.
- If they know the cat's recent condition, habits, or colony status they are the owner or caretaker.

2. Good Samaritan vs. Caretaker

- Good samaritans have no prior relationship with the cat and seek immediate help out of compassion. YCSPCA *can* assist with these.
- Caretakers have an ongoing role in feeding, observing, and managing a group of cats. Necessary veterinary care, including emergency costs are their responsibility.

3. Ownership by Action

- In accordance with PA Title 18, Subchapter Cruelty to Animals, #5532 Neglect of care – caretakers have assumed duty of care for their colonies by providing regular food, monitoring, and care. By law if duty of care has been assumed they need to provide food, water, shelter, and necessary veterinary care. They are unable to pick and choose which things they provide. Failure to provide veterinary care would be considered neglect.

4. YCSPCA Role

- We support caretakers through TNR, SNR, food assistance, and low-cost medical care through our CARMA program.
- We do not serve as an emergency fund for known colony cats or owned pets after hours. Emergency funding must be reserved for stray animals who truly have no one.
- If the animal is stable, we recommend that the caretaker bring the cat to the YCSPCA during regular hours for help.